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Evaluation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for 2017

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is mandated to ensure international protection to refugees and others of concern to the Office of the High Commissioner and to seek permanent solutions to their problems in cooperation with States and other organizations, including through the provision of humanitarian assistance. The present report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) evaluates the role of UNHCR in the registration of refugees and asylum seekers from 2012 to 2016.

Registration responsibilities ultimately reside with the country where refuge or asylum is sought. Within this context, the registration role of UNHCR varies widely: in some countries, the host Government undertakes registration alone; in others, UNHCR supports host Governments' registration work in a variety of ways; and in still others, UNHCR leads the registration process.

In seeking to adapt to a wide range of contexts and challenges and "leave no one behind", UNHCR has played a relevant and, in many cases, crucial role in the registration of an unprecedented number of refugees and asylum seekers. For those who have received assistance, protection and durable solutions, registration has often been essential to the realization of these outcomes. In those settings where registration has been highly effective in achieving swift and comprehensive registration of refugees and asylum seekers, and in contributing to broader UNHCR programmatic objectives, it has harnessed technology, navigated the complexities and challenges in its environments of operation and deliberately capitalized on registration data as an input into programmatic decision-making.

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At the same time, UNHCR has struggled to ensure that resources keep pace with the heightened importance of, and increased demand for, registration. In some operations, the Office of the High Commissioner has created efficiencies to help it partially address this challenge. In other cases, this struggle has put persons of concern at increased risk of human rights violations.

Looking to the future, UNHCR, along with host countries, will be confronted with renewed challenges, many of which are pointed out in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In particular, UNHCR will continue to confront the inherent tension between, on one hand, the potential benefits that may accrue from widespread data sharing and a heightened operational role of Governments in registration, and, on the other, the risks that such measures may entail with regard to the protection of individuals.

OIOS makes five important recommendations, namely, that UNHCR:

- Update the 2003 Handbook for Registration, complete the Identity Management Quality Initiative specifications and strengthen the progressive implementation of its personal data protection policy for persons of concern
- Identify root causes and implications of low registration coverage in individual countries, and identify country operations where enhanced advocacy efforts are needed to ensure that the human rights of all persons of concern are protected in government-led registration processes
- Accelerate finalization and roll-out of proGres v4
- Identify, with partners, which registration data elements most enhance shared efforts to meet needs of persons of concern and develop pertinent indicators
- Increase the number of operations reporting under registration-related objectives

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I. Introduction and objective

1. The Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS-IED) identified the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for evaluation on the basis of a risk assessment designed to identify Secretariat programme evaluation priorities. The Committee for Programme and Coordination selected the evaluation of UNHCR for consideration at its fifty-seventh session in June 2017.[1] This was endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 70/8.

2. The general frame of reference for the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) is provided in General Assembly resolutions 48/218 B, 54/244 and 59/272, as well as Secretary-General's bulletin ST/SGB/273, by which OIOS is authorized to initiate, carry out and report on any action that it considers necessary to fulfil its responsibilities. OIOS evaluation is stipulated in the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation.[2]

3. The overall evaluation objective was to assess the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of UNHCR in fulfilling its role in the registration of refugees and asylum seekers in the period from 2012 to 2016.[3] This topic emerged during a scoping phase described in the evaluation inception paper.[4] The evaluation was conducted in conformity with the norms and standards for evaluation in the United Nations system, as issued by the United Nations Evaluation Group.

4. The comments of UNHCR management were sought on the draft report and taken into account in the final report. The formal UNHCR response is included in annex I to the present report.

II. Background

A. Mandate

5. The objective of UNHCR is to ensure international protection to refugees and others of concern and to seek permanent solutions to their problems in cooperation with States and other organizations, including through the provision of humanitarian assistance.[5] The primary instruments governing the rights of refugees and the legal framework underpinning the work of UNHCR are the statute of the Office of the

[1] See report of the Committee for Programme and Coordination on its fifty-fifth session (A/70/16), para. 108.

[2] ST/SGB/2016/8, regulation 7.1.

[3] The UNHCR mandate also includes stateless people and, within a joint inter-agency approach, internally displaced persons.

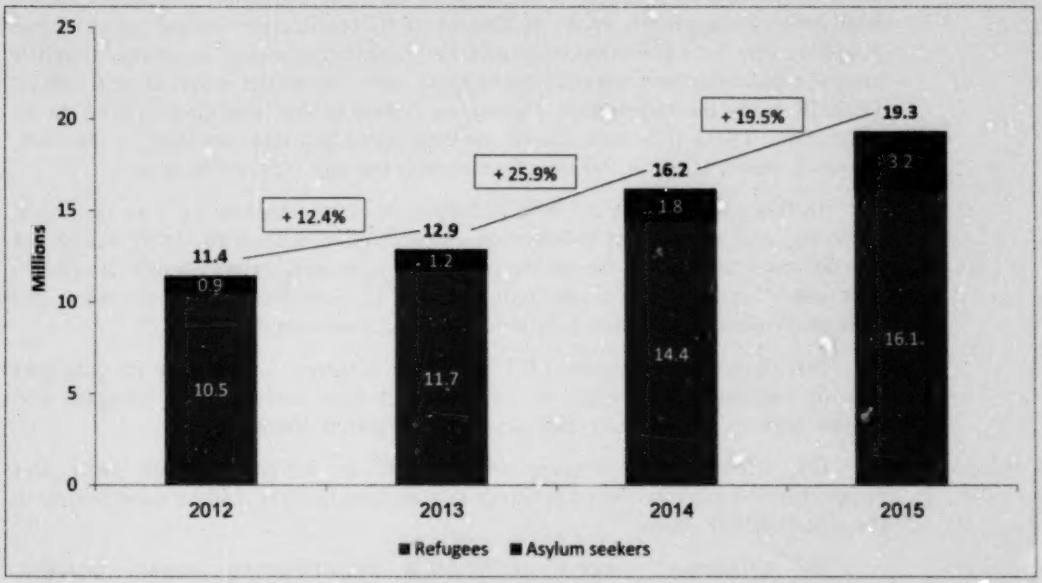
[4] Evaluation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), inception paper (IED-16-013), 3 August 2016.

[5] Biennial programme plan and priorities for the period 2016-2017 (A/69/6/Rev.1), para. 21.1.

High Commissioner, the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol thereto and, where relevant, regional instruments.[6]

6. According to the UNHCR Global Appeal 2017 Update, in 2015, persons of concern to UNHCR numbered 63.9 million, a figure 16.3 per cent greater than that in 2014.[7] Of these, the number of refugees and asylum seekers in 2015 totalled 19.3 million, a figure 19.5 per cent greater than that in 2014. Figure I illustrates this trend.[8]

Figure I
Number of refugees and asylum seekers, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015



Source: UNHCR population statistics, UNHCR Global Appeal 2017 Update, as synthesized by OIOS.

7. UNHCR operational objectives for persons of concern are organized under six groups of goals/rights:

(a) Favourable protection environment;

(b) Fair protection process and documentation;

(c) Security from violence and exploitation;

(d) Basic needs and services;

(e) Community empowerment and self-reliance;

[6] Other instruments include international human rights law; conclusion No. 91 (LII) of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on registration of refugees and asylum-seekers; and the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (General Assembly resolution 71/1).

[7] The number of persons of concern at end 2016 totalled 70.1 million (UNHCR Global Focus, 13 January 2017).

[8] Final 2016 figures are pending.

(f) Durable solutions.[9]

Registration activities fall under goal (b). However, registration is often an important foundation for achieving effectiveness, efficiency and relevance in respect of the remaining goals (see result B).

Role of UNHCR in registration

8. Depending on the applicable legal framework, registration responsibilities ultimately reside with the country where refuge or asylum is sought.[10] Within this context, the role of UNHCR in registration varies considerably, depending on the host country's approach to the fulfilment of its registration obligations. In some countries, the host Government undertakes registration alone. In others, UNHCR supports the host Government's registration work in various ways. In still others, UNHCR leads the registration process on behalf of the host Government. In its evaluation, OIOS-IED took these various scenarios into account; it did not, however, assess scenarios where government is the sole registration actor.

9. In this evaluation, the UNHCR definition of registration, as "the recording, verifying, and updating of information on persons of concern to UNHCR with the aim of protecting and documenting them and of implementing durable solutions", was used.[11] OIOS-IED accordingly framed its relevance-, effectiveness- and efficiency-related evaluation questions under the following criteria:

(a) Relevance: success of UNHCR in aligning its registration role and specific registration activities to the needs of host Governments, refugees and asylum seekers, and partners, and to broader normative frameworks;[12]

(b) Effectiveness: success of UNHCR in helping achieve swift and comprehensive registration of refugees and asylum seekers, and in contributing to the other UNHCR goals;[13]

(c) Efficiency: success of UNHCR in harnessing human, material, technological and financial resources and other inputs to achieve registration-related objectives.

Results A, B and C below cover relevance, effectiveness and efficiency issues, respectively, while result D covers all three areas.

B. Structure and leadership

10. UNHCR is headed by the High Commissioner, who is supported by a Deputy High Commissioner and two Assistant High Commissioners; and is governed by the

[9] Biennial programme budget 2016-2017 of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: report by the High Commissioner (A/AC.96/1147).

[10] See chap. V (Administrative measures) of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees; and citations in footnote 12.

[11] UNHCR Handbook for Registration (September 2003), p. 6, para. 1.1.

[12] Including international refugee law, international human rights law, international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles, and frameworks of cross-cutting issues (e.g., gender).

[13] OIOS-IED did not undertake an impact assessment; instead, it culled examples of unintended consequences.

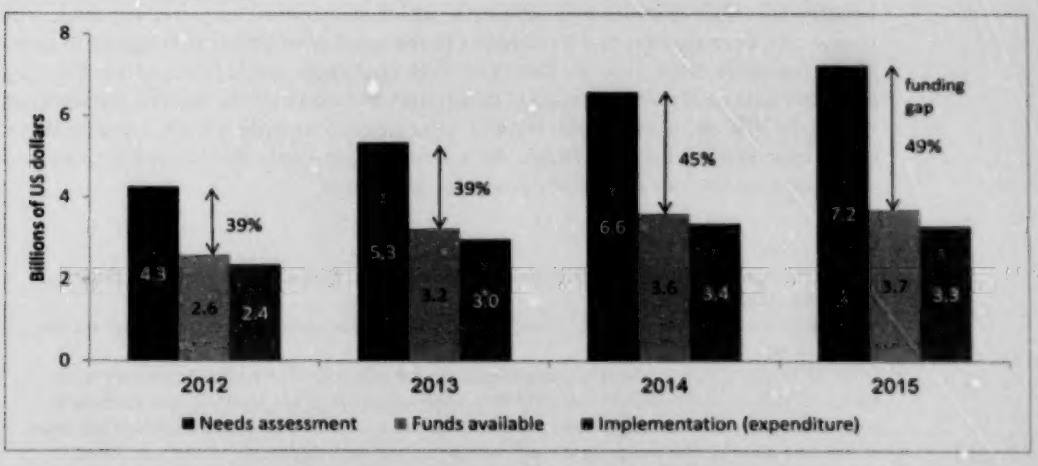
General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council and reports annually to both. The Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which comprises 98 member States, meets regularly. The Executive Committee approves UNHCR programmes and budgets and performs an advisory function.

11. The Executive Office and seven divisions constitute the main office and divisions of UNHCR. UNHCR also encompasses five regional bureaux. At headquarters, registration is the responsibility of the Identity Management and Registration Section within the Division of Programme Support and Management. The Identity Management and Registration Section maintains technical and substantive links, especially with the Field Information and Coordination Support Section and the Division of International Protection. Country-level registration staff receive guidance from the Identity Management and Registration Section and from regional registration officers.

C. Resources

12. A large proportion of UNHCR resources comes from voluntary contributions (extrabudgetary sources), while a far smaller proportion is derived from the United Nations regular budget, the figures being 98.6 per cent versus 1.4 per cent, respectively, on average, from 2012 to 2015.[14] As shown in Figure II, while UNHCR approved budgets grew steadily over this period, so, too, did the size of its funding gaps.

Figure II
Needs, funds available and expenditure, 2012-2015
(Billions of United States dollars)



Sources: 2012-2014 figures: UNHCR biennial programme budget 2016-2017 (A/AC.96/1147); 2015 figures: UNHCR Global Report 2015.
Note: 2016 figures not yet available.

[14] Final 2016 figures pending.

III. Methodology

13. The evaluation used a mixed-method approach featuring the following data sources:

(a) Interviews and focus group discussions at UNHCR headquarters (Geneva and Copenhagen): 52 staff, six partners;

(b) Structured document reviews: 29 memorandums of understanding, standard operating procedures and data-sharing agreements, country registration strategies and over 45 additional documents (e.g., evaluations, audits, guidance documents and legal instruments);

(c) Secondary analysis of monitoring and programme data: UNHCR Global Focus Insight[15] and Managing Systems, Resources and People (MSRP)[16] systems;

(d) Web-based survey: 167 registration field staff representing 75 UNHCR country operations;[17]

(e) Direct observation: six observations of registration facilities, verification exercises and related activities;

(f) Case studies: four in-depth country case studies entailing on-site data collection (Jordan and Kenya) and remote data collection (Ecuador and Malaysia), including location-specific interviews and focus groups, desk reviews, disaggregated survey analysis; and eight case studies entailing a smaller set of desk-based reviews.[18]

14. The evaluation encountered three main limitations: inconsistent or incomplete UNHCR monitoring and performance data,[19] which limited year-on-year trend analysis and cross-country comparisons; a lack of organized and comprehensive country-specific registration-related data, which reduced the universe for document review and case studies; and a reduction in the number of physical missions to case-study countries from four to two. The first challenge was addressed by filtering available data to discard anomalous data points and outliers; the second, by working with UNHCR to obtain data from a convenience sample of 69 representative operations; and the third challenge, by undertaking in-depth desk-based reviews and interviews for the two case-study countries not visited.

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[15] Global Focus Insight aggregates performance information into dashboard views and generates field- and global-level reports.

[16] Managing Systems, Resources and People is the UNHCR enterprise resource planning system.

[17] Response rate of 54.5 per cent.

[18] OIOS-IED used a data exploration technique ("cluster analysis"), with significant assistance from UNHCR, to systematically identify case-study countries. Each selected case study falls within one of the four clusters, distinguished from one another based on the variables indicated in footnote 20. The additional eight case studies focused on Bangladesh, Cameroon, Chad, Lebanon, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal and the United Republic of Tanzania.

[19] Beginning with a 2007 inspection report on UNHCR results-based management systems (INS-07-005), followed by a series of evaluations (E/AC.51/2013/5, E/AC.51/2015/5 and IED-16-001), OIOS highlighted the inadequacy of UNHCR monitoring systems for generating valid, reliable data as a means of developing and implementing programmes in a more evidence-based, data-driven manner. As the Global Focus Insight data constitute the only official source of UNHCR programme data, OIOS had to rely on this source, while fully factoring in limitations.

IV. Evaluation results

A. In seeking to adapt to a wide variety of country contexts and challenges, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has played a relevant and, in many cases, crucial role in the registration of an unprecedented number of refugees and asylum seekers

UNHCR has sought to align its registration role with Governments across a variety of contexts

15. Pursuant to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the country where refuge or asylum is sought is ultimately responsible for registration. Within this framework, UNHCR has adapted its registration role to a wide variety of country contexts.[20]

16. Within these various contexts, UNHCR and host Governments sometimes seek to formally establish their respective registration roles and responsibilities. However, document review revealed that the demarcation of registration roles was not always clear, as many memorandums of understanding were outdated or vague — or even silent — on registration issues. In addition, while some documents on standard operating procedures were highly detailed, they typically covered very discrete exercises (e.g., registration of a certain group or a specific process such as verification), instead of delineating the concrete nature of the operational relationship between UNHCR and host Governments. Sentiment of refugees and asylum seekers in the two case-study countries reflected divergent perspectives: in one country, they reported the respective roles of UNHCR and the host Government and the specific process for obtaining documentation and/or protection to be clear; in the other, the opposite was reported.

17. In contrast, the perception of registration officers surveyed was largely positive, with 74 per cent agreeing strongly or somewhat that the assigned distribution of registration tasks between UNHCR and the government was clear and well defined.[21] This sentiment may indicate that a lack of clarity in the demarcation of roles on paper does not necessarily translate into a lack of clarity in practice. In Jordan, UNHCR and the Government reported close collaboration despite a somewhat unclear demarcation of roles in memorandums of understanding and standard operating procedures. This sentiment could also imply that relationships in the registration context are often dynamic, with changes sometimes remaining undocumented. In Ecuador, UNHCR shifted from leading the registration process to providing technical support to the government. In Kenya, the somewhat unclear demarcation of roles on paper was mirrored in a lack of clarity in practice — a conclusion corroborated by UNHCR staff interviewees, government officials and refugees and asylum seekers.

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[20] Cluster analysis revealed a typology of four registration-relevant country profiles, which differed from each other based on variables such as operation size, number of refugees and asylum seekers, likelihood of the occurrence of an emergency operation, use of biometrics, host-country registration capacity, and type of UNHCR registration role.

[21] 46 responses: mean = 3.13, median = 3.00 on a scale where 4 = strongly agree, 3 = somewhat agree, 2 = somewhat disagree and 1 = strongly disagree.

18. Besides broadly articulating its role in relation to the host Government, UNHCR also sought to align its specific registration activities with concrete needs: this activity-level alignment was especially critical in those contexts where neither UNHCR nor the government assumed sole responsibility for registration, and where, instead, UNHCR supported the government. Analysis of Identity Management and Registration Section data, coupled with case-study analysis, revealed that in those countries where UNHCR supported the host Government in conducting registration, it actively sought to tailor its support to the Government's expressed needs, through, for example, training and capacity-building, and technology and systems (e.g., hardware and/or software) provision. Thus, while its support to host Governments has varied in intensity and scope, UNHCR has nevertheless managed to navigate divergent contexts and demonstrate its relevance by leveraging its expertise on registration, documentation and case management issues.

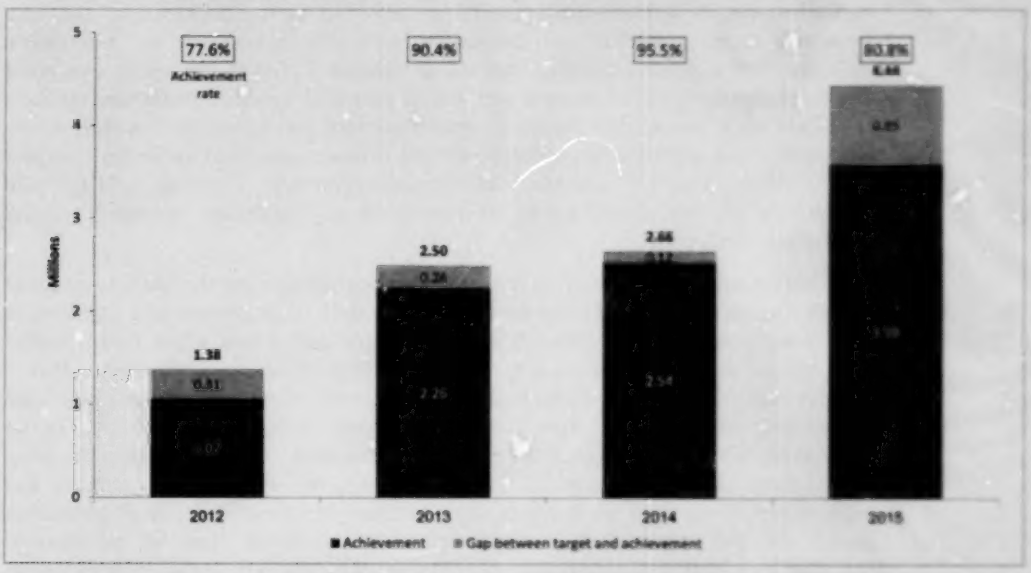
UNHCR has been crucial in registering refugees and asylum seekers and in working to "leave no one behind"

19. Responding to unprecedented displacement levels (see figure III), in 2015 UNHCR registered, or supported host Governments in registering, 41 per cent more refugees and asylum seekers than in 2014 and more than three times as many as in 2012. However, as mentioned in paragraph 43 below, these efforts still fell short of reaching the entire population of refugees and asylum seekers. It was impossible to separate out UNHCR effectiveness from that of host Governments where registration was undertaken jointly; and OIOS-IED documented UNHCR results more definitively in those scenarios where it undertook registration exclusively. In Malaysia, UNHCR reported registering some 150,000 persons of concern by end October 2016, without government assistance or support. In Lebanon, UNHCR had registered some 1.1 million refugees before the Government suspended registration in 2015.[22]

[22] See http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/persons_of_concern.

Figure III

Number of refugees and asylum seekers registered on an individual basis with minimum set of data required (achievement, target and achievement rate), across reported profile groups, in millions



Source: OIOS-IED Global Focus Insight analysis.
Note: Outliers and data points without targets or results were excluded. Final 2016 figures are pending.

20. In addition to aiming at meeting registration needs on an overall numerical basis, UNHCR deliberately aligned its work with international legal and normative frameworks related to refugees, international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law. Analysis of registration guidance documents[23] confirmed this alignment[24] and that cross-cutting issues of age, gender and diversity were systematically incorporated into UNHCR registration-related guidance documents. Some standard operating procedures (e.g., for Cameroon and Lebanon) demonstrated attention to persons with specific needs.

21. Direct observations demonstrated that UNHCR sought to put these principles into practice through efforts to leave no one behind,[25] that is to say, to reach all in need, regardless of geography or population. In Kenya, UNHCR conducted mobile registration in Mombasa and border patrols in northern Kenya and undertook specific efforts to register and advocate for the most vulnerable and persons with

[23] E.g., UNHCR Emergency Handbook, and its specific chapters on the civilian and humanitarian character of asylum, emergency registration, identifying persons with specific needs, and refugee status determination; Procedural Standards for Refugee Status Determination; and UNHCR Handbook for Registration.

[24] Alignment of guidance documents to normative standards does not necessarily mean that those standards are followed consistently in implementation, which is an issue beyond the scope of the present evaluation.

[25] Pursuant to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; and World Humanitarian Summit UNHCR commitments (2016).

specific needs (e.g., unaccompanied children and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons. In Jordan, UNHCR assisted Syrian refugees who were entering the country without documentation, or through informal border crossings, in regularizing their status and becoming documented. In Za'atari camp in Jordan, people with medical conditions recorded during registration, and who were thus unable to collect their assistance, were able to authorize an "alternative collector" of assistance on their behalf. In Kenya, UNHCR has made concerted efforts to register LGBTI persons and record potential cases of sexual and gender-based violence, potentially enabling custom-tailored assistance. In Ecuador, where government-run registration processes did not capture individual vulnerabilities and special needs, UNHCR recorded these issues separately, enabling UNHCR and partners to provide some degree of protection and advocate on behalf of the individuals concerned.

22. Surveyed registration officers were of mixed opinion on the success of these efforts. On the one hand, 83 per cent agreed strongly or somewhat that registration staff were generally knowledgeable about human rights and knew how to treat refugees and asylum seekers in accordance with United Nations norms and values;[26] 78 per cent also agreed strongly or somewhat that registration processes successfully identified the most vulnerable persons with specific needs.[27] On the other hand, fewer staff felt that the registration function was successful in reaching out to those in remote locations.[28] In interviews, the appraisal of refugees and asylum seekers as well as implementing partners on these issues was somewhat mixed. On the other hand, partners did note, positively, that the information collected by UNHCR during registration was often highly relevant in contributing to the timeliness and effectiveness of their own interventions.

B. UNHCR registration work has been essential to the effective delivery of assistance, protection and solutions to those who have received these benefits; at the same time, where registration shortcomings exist, persons of concern have been at increased risk of human rights violations

23. Registration serves as the foundation for achieving the assistance, protection and solutions at the core of the UNHCR mandate, which is to ensure international protection to refugees and others of concern and "to seek permanent solutions to their problems in cooperation with States and other organizations, including through the provision of humanitarian assistance."[29] Figure IV indicates that the broader programmatic purpose of registration is clear to those most directly responsible for registration work.

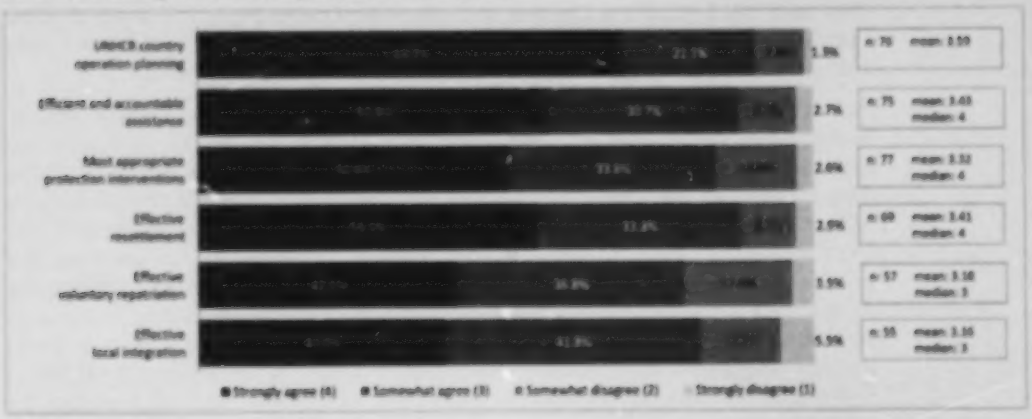
[26] 81 responses: mean = 3.44, median = 4.00, on a scale where 4 = strongly agree, 3 = somewhat agree, 2 = somewhat disagree and 1 = strongly disagree.

[27] 46 responses: mean = 3.27, median = 4.00, on the same scale as above.

[28] 28.4 per cent of respondents strongly agree and 39.5 per cent agree somewhat with the statement that "[t]he registration function is able to reach out to refugees and asylum seekers in remote locations", while 28.4 per cent somewhat or strongly disagree.

[29] UNHCR Handbook for Registration (2003), p. 6.

Figure IV
Understanding on the part of registration staff of the UNHCR registration role as contributing to broader programmatic goals


UNHCR country operation planning
Efficient and accountable assistance
Most appropriate protection interventions
Effective resettlement
Effective voluntary repatriation
Effective local integration
n: 70 mean: 3.59
n: 75 mean: 3.63 median: 4
n: 77 mean: 3.52 median: 4
n: 69 mean: 3.41 median: 4
n: 57 mean: 3.16 median: 3
n: 55 mean: 3.16 median: 3
Strongly agree (4)
Somewhat agree (3)
Somewhat disagree (2)
Strongly disagree (1)

Source: Staff survey.

24. Moreover, there is evidence from multiple sources, across various country-level contexts, that registration data have been essential to advancing these broader programmatic goals.

1. Registration contributing to assistance

25. Basic assistance constitutes a core right under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (General Assembly resolution 217 A (III)).[30] In many countries, refugees' receipt of basic assistance — e.g., shelter, cash, water, sanitation and hygiene — was contingent upon registration. In these scenarios, registration efforts directly led to assistance for those who received it.

26. Analysis of other, less clear-cut scenarios provided a more mixed picture: e.g., some did not receive assistance because they were not registered (see result A), some of those registered received assistance and others did not, and some received assistance although it was inadequate. In settings where UNHCR registration work has been highly effective, technology that was well implemented and well supported was an enabling factor (see paras. 49 and 50). In Jordan, iris scans for payment at the supermarket helped improve data accuracy, which in turn resulted in more effective food distribution; and refugees and asylum seekers, as well as key partners, appreciated these advances. Partners in Jordan, Kenya and in several other operations cited online registration applications as having improved their ability to more effectively target and deliver assistance. The main registration application is proGres (the Profile Global Registration System), developed in 2003 and now used in 97 operations. In South Africa, proGres reportedly prevented fraud, as caseworkers could verify case details without having to retrieve physical files.[31]

[30] Article 25.
[31] Global survey of the implementation of UNHCR's Policy on Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas, 2012.

27. Technological innovations did not contribute positively to assistance in all settings, however. Document review revealed that, in Western Sahara, although Access, then proGres, applications were used for registration exercises in 2004, 2008 and 2012, data quality and reliability were very poor, requiring constant manual verifications.[32] The combination of this time-consuming verification work and low staff capacity resulted in less-effective provision of assistance.

28. Another frequently cited factor hindering assistance centred on time frames. Refugee and asylum-seeker interviewees, as well as a desk review of evaluations and audits, consistently criticized the long time frames for registration and/or determination of status, and then for receiving assistance. Figure XII provides data indicating the wide variation between registration time frames between 2012 and 2016 across the UNHCR operations that reported. A number of onerous steps and insufficient communication regarding those steps were also cited by interviewees. At the same time, desk review noted numerous efforts that improved effectiveness by addressing long wait times. In Lebanon, wait time was reduced to 2-3 weeks through utilization of a model that enabled UNHCR to quickly establish a registration network in response to the Syrian emergency, barcode scanning for identification of Syrians and the use of online portals. In Malaysia, streamlined refugee status determination guidelines, combined with new scheduling strategies and case-management tools, resulted in the reduction of the average time from first interview to notification of results from 175 days to less than 75.[33] Figure XII data also provide some evidence of a reduction, between 2012 and 2016, in the average number of days required for registration.

2. Registration contributing to protection

29. As rooted in the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949,[34] and Additional Protocol I to the four Geneva Conventions, and elsewhere, protection allows people to maintain their rights. Registration plays a key role in protection by helping establish identity, location and legal status in the host country; assisting in obtaining requisite identification papers; assisting in the prevention of refoulement; and identifying specific needs. Examples present a mixed picture of how UNHCR registration has contributed to protection in these ways.

30. Refugee and asylum-seeker interviewees acknowledged that UNHCR registration documents generally facilitated freedom of movement, even in the absence of official residency documents.[35] An analysis of evaluations and audits corroborated this perception, providing examples where registration had proved pivotal, e.g., in Jordan, where registration helped establish identity beyond a doubt, maintain the family unit and prevent trafficking;[36] and South Sudan, where it helped

[32] Ibid.

[33] UNHCR Policy Development and Evaluation Service (PDES), "From slow boil to breaking point: a real time evaluation of UNHCR's response to the Syrian refugee emergency" (PDES/2013/10), July 2013; and UNHCR PDES, "But when will our turn come? a review of implementation of UNHCR's urban refugee policy in Malaysia" (PDES/2012/02), May 2012.

[34] Article 44.

[35] Kenya and Jordan focus groups and case-study frameworks.

[36] Independent Programme Evaluation of UNHCR's response to the refugee influx in Lebanon and Jordan (29 January 2015).

achieve broader protection objectives.[37] Here, too, technological advances (e.g., proGres and biometrics) and better-organized processes helped facilitate the registration processes leading to these improved outcomes, in addition to reducing backlogs and the number of "recyclers" and "absent refugees".

31. Evaluations and audits also indicated that insufficient registration information had negatively affected protection. Protracted use of level 1 registration in Lebanon "limited the capacity to identify and address protection needs for many months, especially in instances where refugees were not going to live in camps but were, instead, dispersing across the country".[38] In Malaysia, some individuals faced serious protection risks (e.g., arrest, detention and extortion) and were more reluctant to move around to find work (which resulted in a loss of income needed for survival) as they awaited registration by UNHCR.[39] In Ethiopia, "the way nationality screening was conducted and the suspension of registration, without adequate provision of services at entry points, considerably reduced de facto access to protection and asylum for refugees".[40] In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, "the majority of [persons of concern] without a valid ID document continued to face obstacles in terms of protection from institutional violence and access to basic needs."[41] In interviews, refugees and asylum seekers, government representatives, non-governmental organization partners and UNHCR staff corroborated the significant challenges in this area.

3. Registration contributing to durable solutions[42]

32. Pursuant to the UNHCR mandate, durable solutions for refugees and asylum seekers encompass three primary remedies: integration into the host country, voluntary repatriation to one's country of origin and resettlement in a third country. While resettlement is available to a relatively small proportion of refugees and asylum seekers, it remains an important solution for the many refugees who benefit from it.

33. Representatives of resettlement countries indicated that UNHCR has been highly effective in supporting the collection of registration data which has enabled credible identity verification, which, in turn, has led to successful resettlement referral work by UNHCR. All 10 interviewees from top resettlement countries rated UNHCR positively in this respect.

34. In Jordan, tangible results referenced by interviewees were documented. In 2015, a total of 12,246 persons were referred through the regular resettlement programme. In addition, as part of the Canadian resettlement programme, in late

[37] UNHCR-PDES, "Flooding across the border: a review of UNHCR's response to the Sudanese refugee emergency in South Sudan" (PDES/2013/08), July 2013.

[38] The evaluation acknowledges that "this may have been a necessity", but that "consequences were probably not fully appreciated" (see Independent Programme Evaluation of UNHCR's Response to the refugee influx in Lebanon and Jordan).

[39] "But when will our turn come? a review of implementation of UNHCR's urban refugee policy in Malaysia", 2012. (See footnote 33.) Nearly all Kenya interviewees corroborated this experience.

[40] Evaluation of UNHCR's Response to the L3 South Sudan Refugee Crisis in Uganda and Ethiopia (PDES/2016/01), 2016.

[41] Audit of UNHCR operations in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, September 2016.

[42] OIOS-IED analysis focused primary on resettlement because it was the only durable-solutions area with sufficient data.

2015, UNHCR referred 12,097 persons for resettlement in under two months. Following this success, the programme of the United States of America requested referrals of 9,000 persons for resettlement in a two-month period, a target that was exceeded prior to the deadline.[43] While staff efforts were a factor, another key component was the joint work of the Middle East and North Africa-Jordan office on innovative UNHCR systems which were well suited to this task. For example, building on registration data, AIM software was developed to incorporate 36 filters, which enabled the operation to use data (e.g., proGres and vulnerability data) to identify, then refer, those cases with the highest resettlement potential. In Kenya, government representatives on resettlement reported a positive working relationship with UNHCR, indicating that UNHCR adeptly navigated difficult circumstances to successfully expedite resettlement for urgent protection cases (e.g., women at risk and survivors of violence).

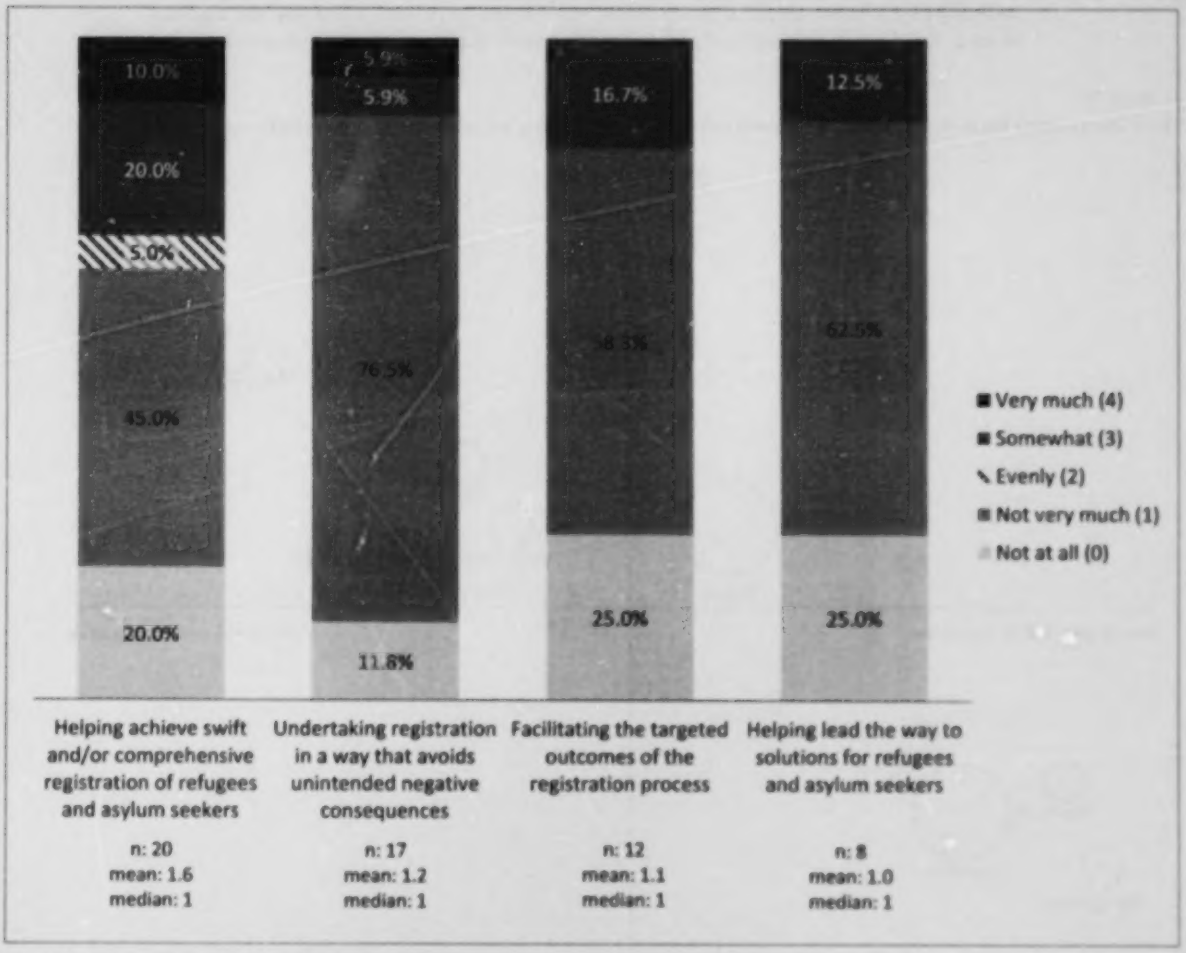
35. Notwithstanding these examples of effectiveness, interviewees also pointed to areas needing further attention: further implementation of innovative technology at the global level (see result C); data security and data-sharing issues (see result D); registration staff levels to support sustained resettlement surge activities (including less reliance on affiliated staff); and strengthened staff training.

Overall registration effectiveness has been somewhat negative to mixed, owing to several key factors

36. In contrast, beyond these specific programmatic areas and at a broader organizational level, an analysis of 27 evaluations and audits determined UNHCR effectiveness on four key dimensions of registration to be somewhat negative (see figure V).

[43] UNHCR, All plan narrative report, planning year 2017.

Figure V
Summary of overall UNHCR registration effectiveness, based on a desk review of evaluations and audits



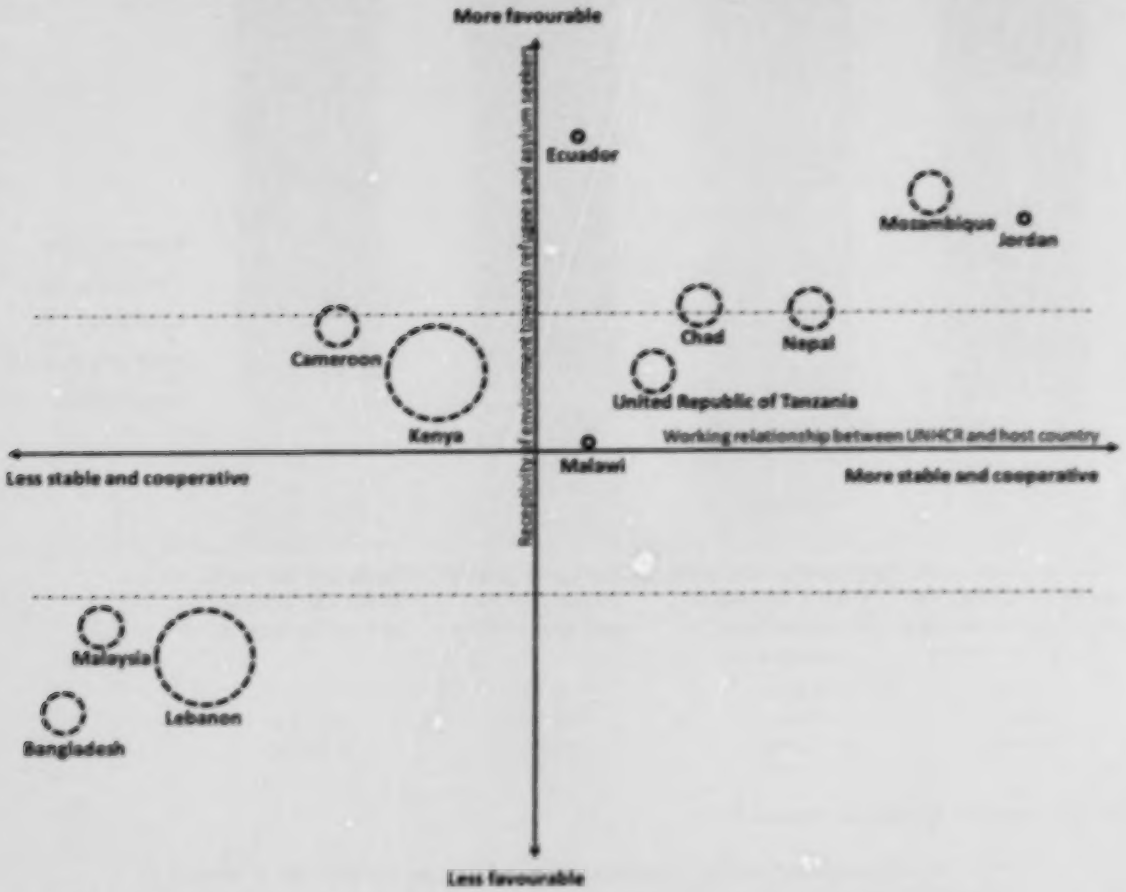
Source: OIOS analysis of evaluations and audits.

37. As indicated in result A, a range of external factors affected the relevance of UNHCR registration work. The same relevance-related factors also influenced effectiveness.

38. Two of these external contextual factors were relational in nature: one centring on the relationship between the host Government and refugees and asylum seekers (i.e., in terms of the variable degree of receptivity to these persons of concern) and the other centring on the working relationship between UNHCR and the host Government. A third contextual factor centred on the security risk in the host country. Figure VI summarizes these main constraints, whose influence has been

borne out by interviews and applied to the 12 case-study countries.[46] At same time, the precise ways in which they might have affected registration were not systematically documented. This suggests that where security risks were lower (as indicated by smaller circles), government receptivity to refugees and asylum seekers tended, as did stability and cooperation with UNHCR on registration, to be higher.

Figure VI
Key contextual factors influencing effectiveness of UNHCR registration in 12 case-study countries



Sources: Global Peace Index, Global Terrorism Index and Department of Safety and Security rating as proxies for security risk (equally weighted); Global Focus Insight narrative reports — operations plan 2017.

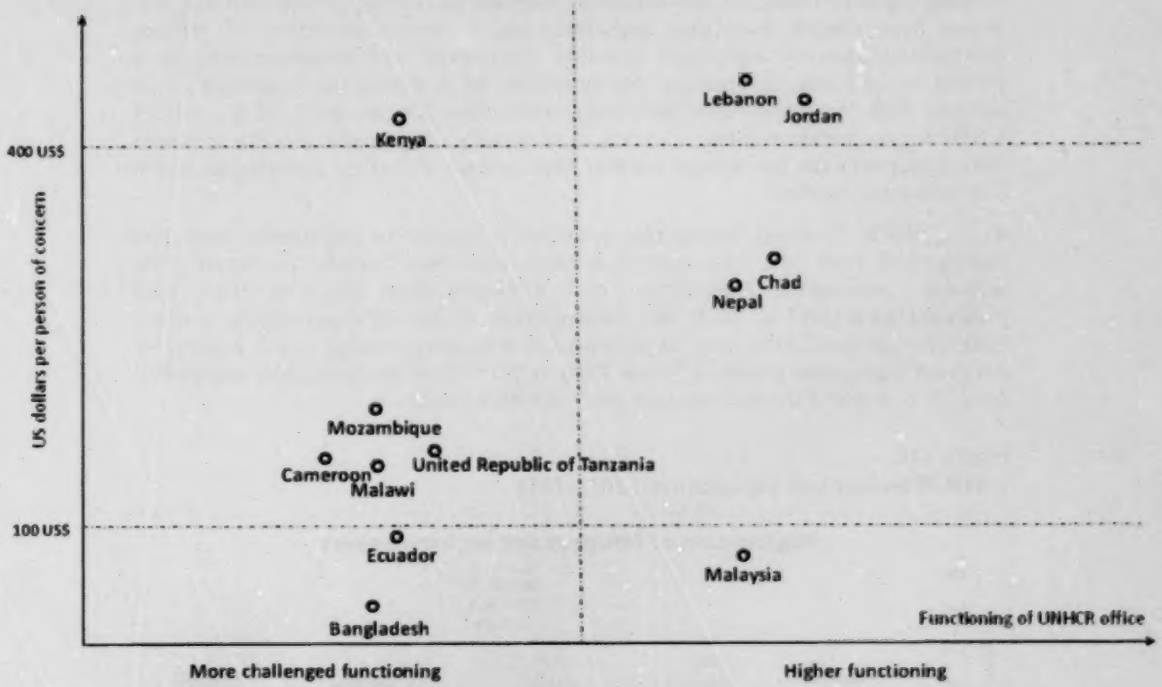
Note: Circle sizes correspond proportionally to individual countries' security risk (low/medium/high). Working relationship analysis based on issues and challenges reported by UNHCR operations, which do not always coincide with the government's viewpoint. The nature of the relationship with government is frequently correlated with receptivity to refugees and the protection environment, making it difficult to disentangle these factors.

[46] This included the feedback of host government representatives themselves, in some cases.

39. The main internal factor influencing UNHCR registration effectiveness centred on the overall functioning of the UNHCR country office.[45] Figure VII, also rooted in document review as well as stakeholder feedback, indicates a moderate positive correlation[46] between level of office functionality and office resource levels (in terms of overall budget and the staff-to-persons of concern ratio).

Figure VII

Key internal factors influencing UNHCR registration effectiveness in 12 case-study countries, in relation to overall office resourcing



Sources: UNHCR-host government memorandums of understanding; UNHCR standard operating procedures; 2017 Global Focus Insight narrative report data; OIOS case-study analyses; OIOS analysis of evaluations and audits; Global Focus Insight budget information-operations plan 2017 (all figures from 2017).

Note: Higher functioning corresponds to better-resourced staff capacity, better use of innovation/technology and clearer and more precise memorandums of understanding/standard operating procedures. More challenged functioning corresponds to the inverse characteristics.

[45] Defined using proxy variables related to staff capacity, use of technology and innovation, and the clarity and specificity of memorandums of understanding and standard operating procedures.

[46] Kendall's tau-b=0.36.

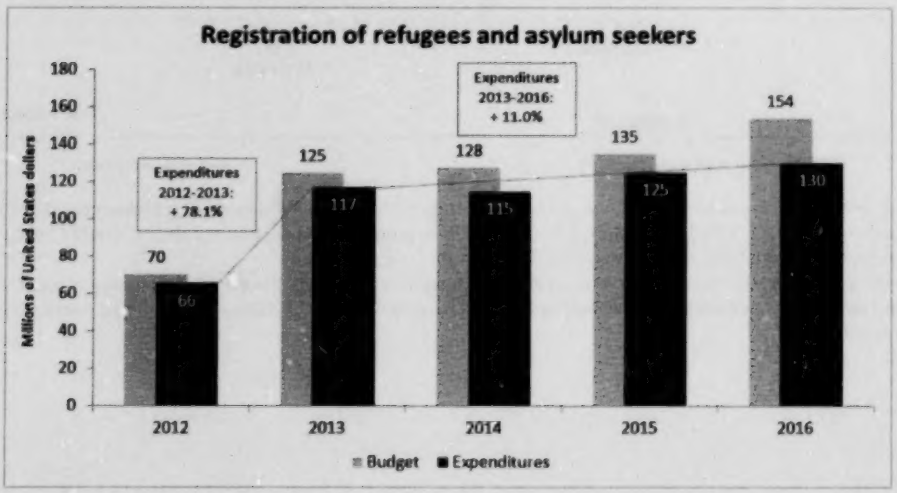
C. UNHCR has struggled to ensure that its resources keep pace with the heightened importance of, and increased demand for, registration; it has created efficiencies through strong staff contributions, policy refinement, technological advances and strengthened partnerships

UNHCR has struggled to ensure that human and financial resources meet demands

40. There has been a sharp rise in the demand for registration services, owing to a surging number of refugees and asylum seekers and expanding government demand. States have placed increasing importance on improved collection of refugee information and on "early and effective registration and documentation, as a protection tool and to facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance",[47] in keeping with the foundational role registration plays for the work of the rest of UNHCR (see paras. 9 (b) and 23-35). Additionally, heightened security concerns have prompted calls for stronger identity management of foreign populations within host countries' borders.

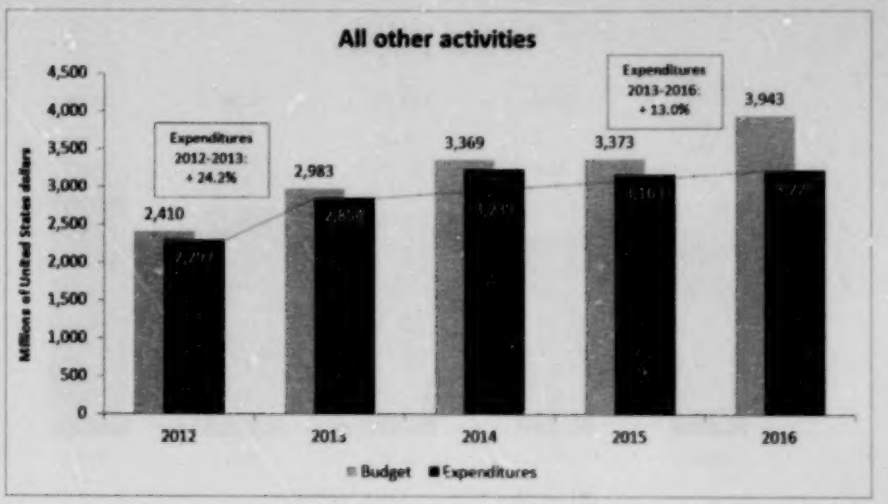
41. UNHCR financial and human resources allocated to registration and data management have not increased in tandem with these trends. As figure VIII indicates, registration expenditures rose markedly from 2012 to 2013, then plateaued from 2013 to 2016; this pattern mirrored that of expenditures in other UNHCR functions. Moreover, as figure IX shows, after a surge in the number of occupied registration positions[48] from 2012 to 2013, these increased only marginally until 2016, and at a slower pace than other UNHCR positions.

Figure VIII
UNHCR budget and expenditures, 2012-2016



[47] New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (General Assembly resolution 71/1), paras. 25, 40 and 70-71.

[48] I.e., position titles containing "registration" or "registry." Frequently, the registration function was performed by staff with other responsibilities as well. However, UNHCR does not break down the time allocated by these staff to registration.

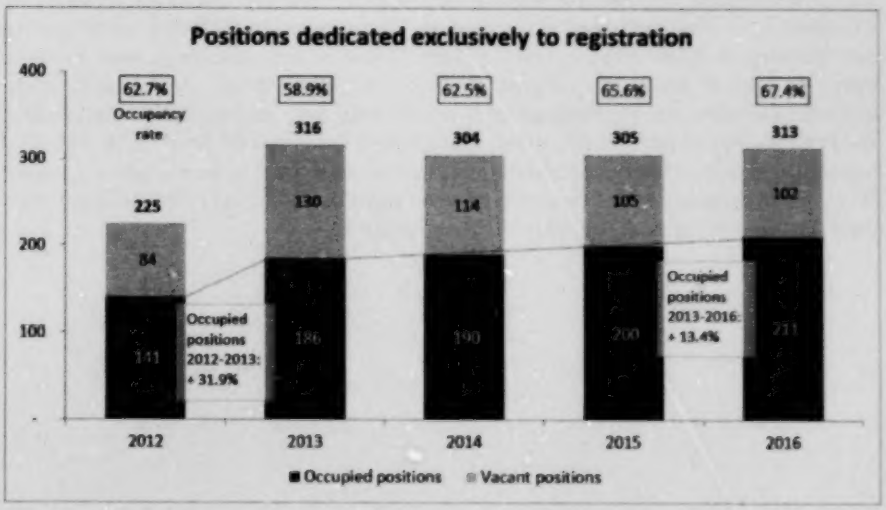


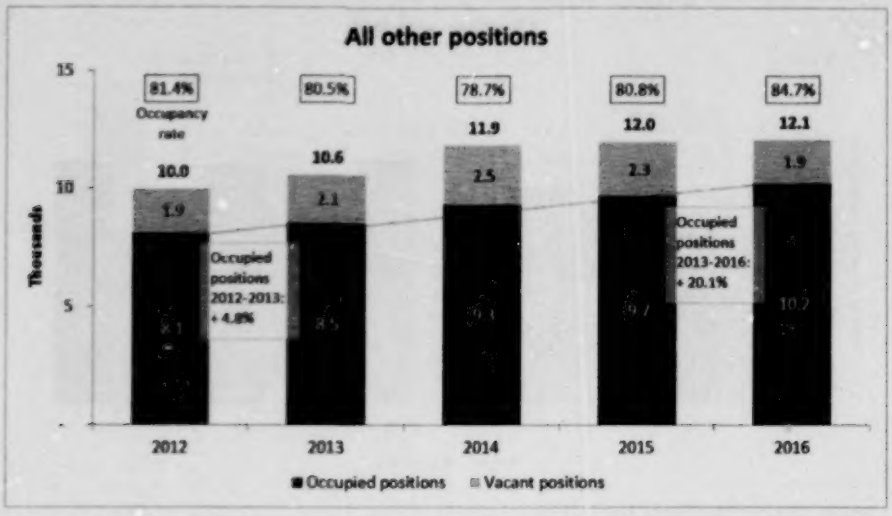
Source: OIOS-IED Global Focus Insight analysis.

Note: Budget and expenditures for registration relate, concomitantly, to one of four UNHCR planning objectives, and to population planning groups exclusively composed of refugees and asylum seekers.

Figure IX

Occupied, vacant and total positions, and occupancy rate, 2012-2016





Source: OIOS-IED Global Focus Insight analysis.

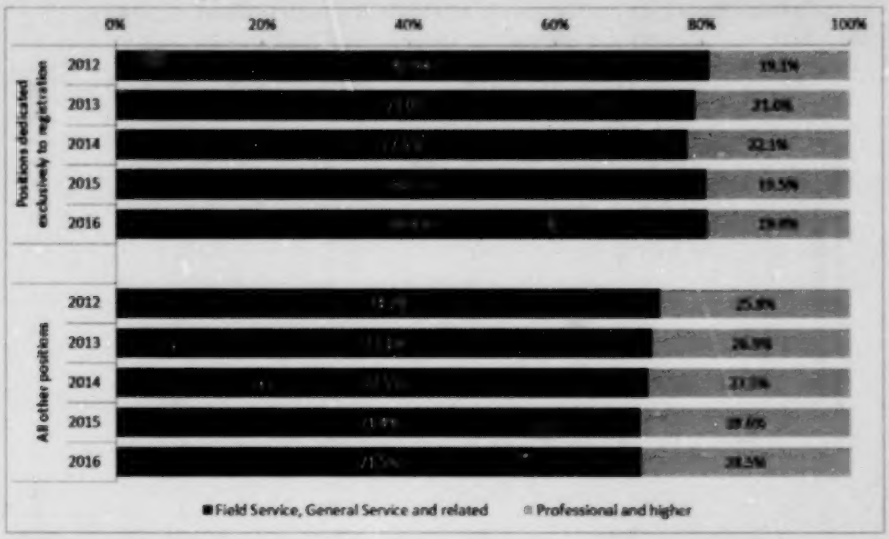
Note: UNHCR also relies, sometimes heavily, on an affiliate workforce. However, there are no centralized records on that workforce for 2012-2016. That there are lower overall occupancy rates in registration-related positions is partly due to the need for flexibility; this enables surge staffing in emergencies.

42. Furthermore, registration was conducted at a relatively low level, in terms of expected functional skills and remuneration. Registration staff[49] were more heavily concentrated in Field Service, General Service and related categories than those in other functional areas (see Figure X).[50] Direct observations during case-study missions revealed that registration staff consistently bore responsibilities exceeding the performance requirements commensurate with their official level. Although it is understandable that many operational registration staff must be at a relatively junior level, the preponderance of these junior-level positions is arguably inconsistent with the ever-more-prominent role played by registration.

[49] See footnote 48.

[50] In the United Nations Secretariat, 32 per cent of staff are in the Professional and higher categories (see A/71/360).

Figure X
Distribution of UNHCR positions among staff categories (all operations), 2012-2016



Source: OIOS-IED Global Focus Insight analysis.

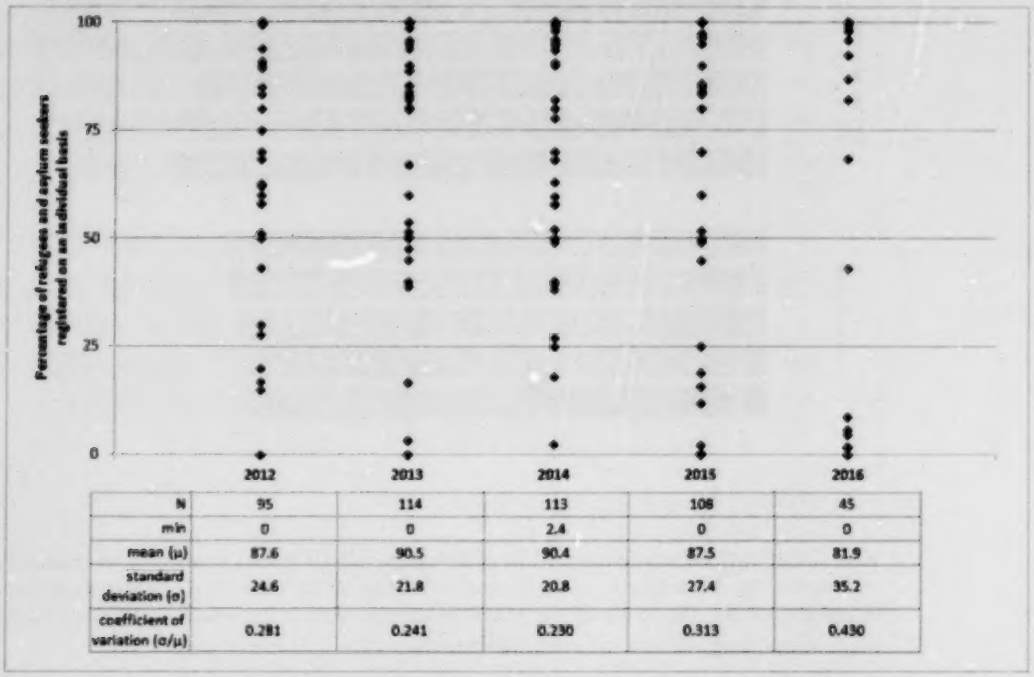
43. Despite the aforementioned resource gaps, UNHCR has continued to respond to increasing demands at a high rate of registration coverage. This increasing demand took a toll, however, as the overall registration coverage rate, while still high, slipped significantly. Figure III illustrates both of these trends.

44. UNHCR capacity to continue absorbing these increased demands is showing signs of unsustainability. Figure XI, plotting individual country operations' self-reported proportion of refugees and asylum seekers registered for each year evaluated, shows proportions that vary widely, indicating widely disparate coverage levels. Figure XII reveals similarly wide variation in the average number of days that country operations reported having taken from initial approach to registration. (All country operations for which data were available were included in these analyses, not merely country case studies. The number of country operations reporting in any given year therefore varies, from 5 to 114, and individual dots in these figures might represent more than one country operation.)[51]

[51] See footnote 19.

Figure XI

Distribution of the proportion of refugees and asylum seekers registered on an individual basis (per profile group, all UNHCR country offices reporting, 2012-2016

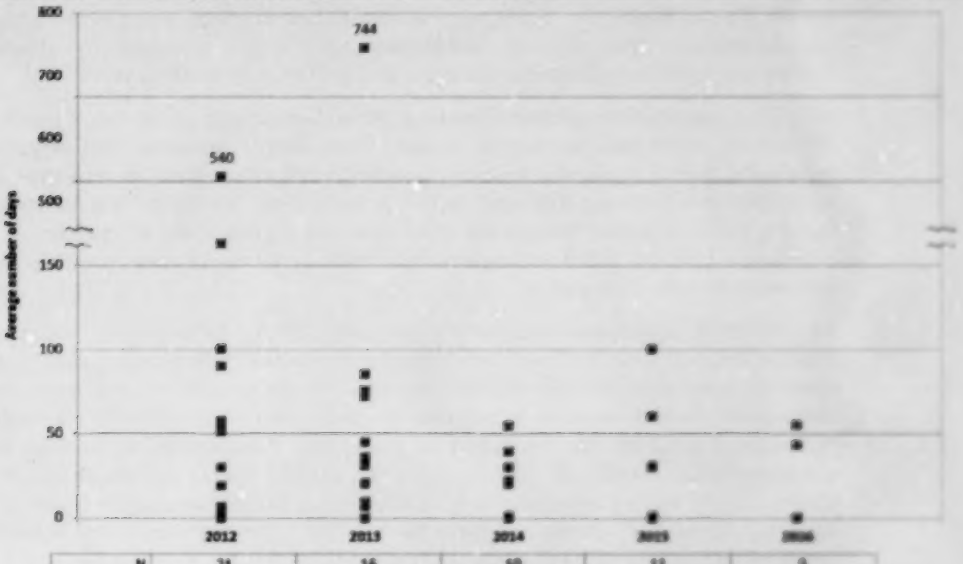


	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
N	95	114	113	108	45
min	0	0	2.4	0	0
mean (μ)	87.6	90.5	90.4	87.5	81.9
standard deviation (σ)	24.6	21.8	20.8	27.4	35.2
coefficient of variation (σ/μ)	0.281	0.241	0.230	0.313	0.430

Source: OIOS-IED Global Focus Insight analysis.

Note: Measures of central tendency and variabiiity exclude outliers. Figures for 2016 are midyear results.

Figure XII
Distribution of the average number of days from approach to individual registration of refugees and asylum seekers (per profile group), all UNHCR country offices reporting, 2012-2016



	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
N	21	16	10	11	5
min	0	0	0	0	0
max	540	744	54	100	55
mean (μ)	42	34	20	29	20
median	30	31	21	1	0
standard deviation (σ)	45	29	18	31	24
coefficient of variation (σ/μ)	1.083	0.853	0.912	1.046	1.200

Source: OIOS-IED Global Focus Insight analysis.
Note: Measures of central tendency and variability exclude outliers. Figures for 2016 are midyear results.

45. Case studies confirm this picture of "unstable equilibrium", in which disruptions can have wider impacts. In Kenya, when registration had to be suspended for a month in 2016 following government administrative rearrangements, a backlog was created which, five months later, had not yet been cleared by UNHCR and the government, despite their best efforts. Similarly, the Malaysia operation reported that the size of the unregistered population, equivalent to one third of those registered, is a challenge, given the current processing capacity; hence, cases have been prioritized according to protection needs.

UNHCR sought to increase efficiency through improved policies and technology

46. Staff emphasized the importance of local-level innovation as an enabling factor, which helped them meet or exceed expectations. Headquarters- and country-level interviewees pointed out that the frequently lauded ability of offices in the Middle East to handle the recent surge in registration demands was possible only in an environment that allowed innovations to emerge, bolstered by financial resources, expedited recruitment practices and staff with innovation skills.

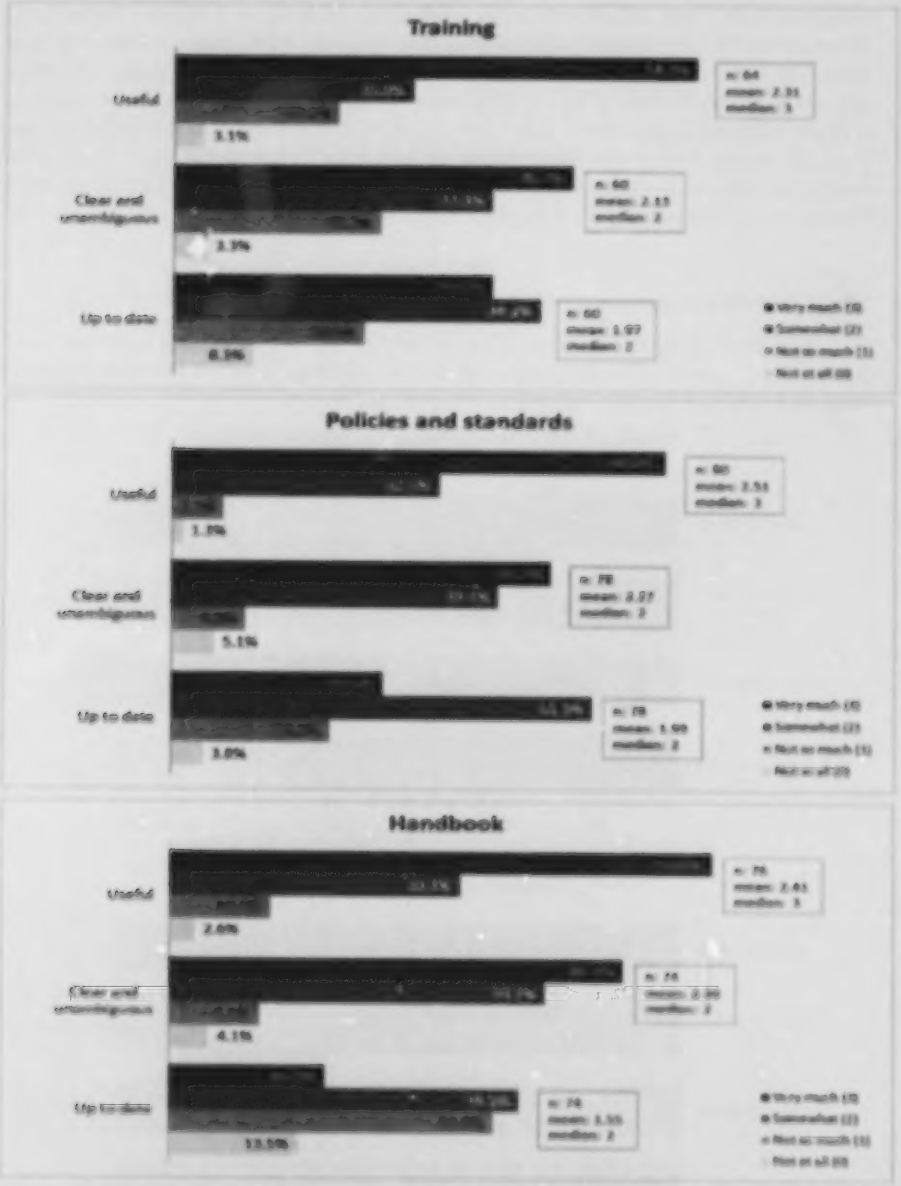
47. This potential for greater efficiency through enhanced skills was attested by registration staff's need for further capacity development. Surveyed staff repeatedly mentioned unmet needs for training, coaching and orientation on standards and guidelines and for being kept updated on policies. Staff tended to rate registration training as being useful, though not up to date (see Figure XIII). At the time of the evaluation, UNHCR had been implementing training on registration in emergencies and on continuous registration.

48. UNHCR issued new registration standards (2016), following an analysis of how the original ones had been implemented since 2003. While being concise and more generic and principle-based, the new standards are at the same time comprehensive and serve as parameters for staff, who rated UNHCR registration policies and standards for the most part favourably. Additionally, while most staff considered the Handbook for Registration useful, based on feedback from approximately half of respondents, its usefulness is limited because it is not up to date (see figure XIII). In fact, it dates back to 2003. Interviewees noted a need to fast-track the current plan to update the Handbook by 2019.

49. UNHCR also began introducing agency-wide policies and systems to facilitate more comprehensive coverage of the registration function. The expansion of the dedicated expanded Identity Management and Registration Section, beginning in January 2016, underscored the growth of the profile of registration within UNHCR. Headquarters was designing new policies for this area, most notably the Identity Management Quality Initiative, the planned purpose of which is to ensure that persons of concern are known to UNHCR and host countries and that registration capacity can be improved for better protection of and assistance to dispersed populations. However, these measures are still works in progress: global-level benefits have not yet accrued.

Figure XIII
UNHCR staff perspective on sources of registration guidance

"Overall, how would you rate [the following UNHCR sources of registration guidance] in terms of their being useful, clear and unambiguous, and up to date?"

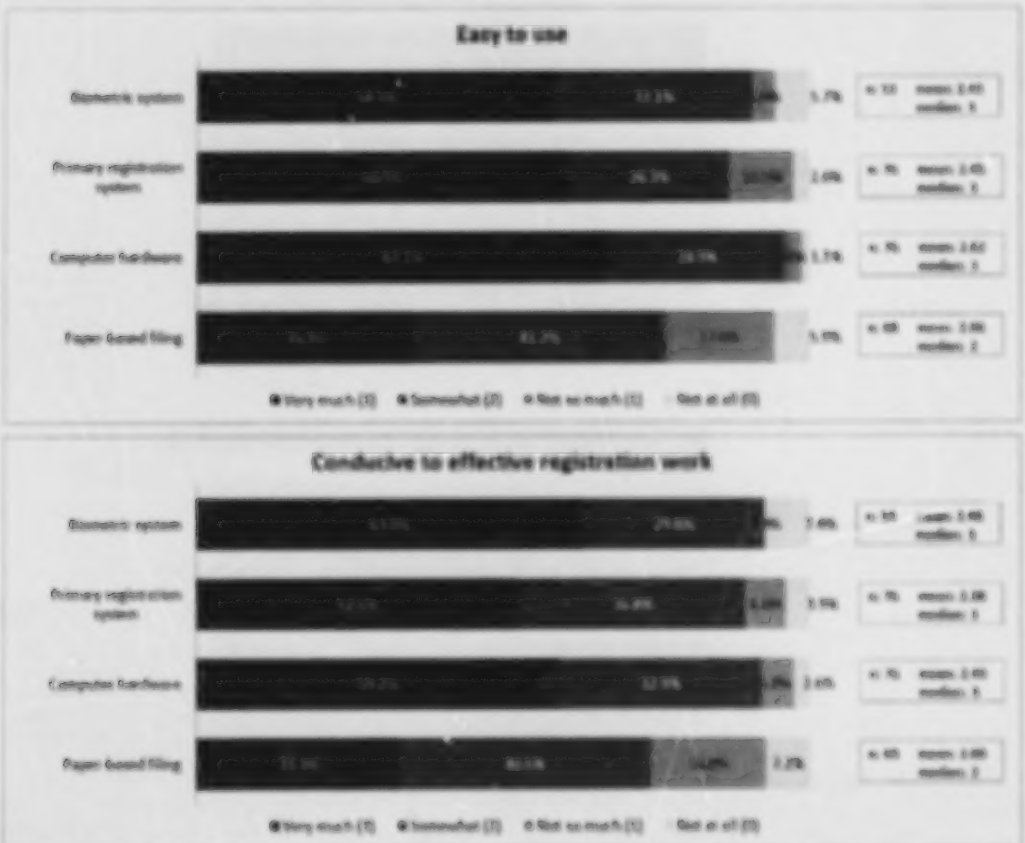


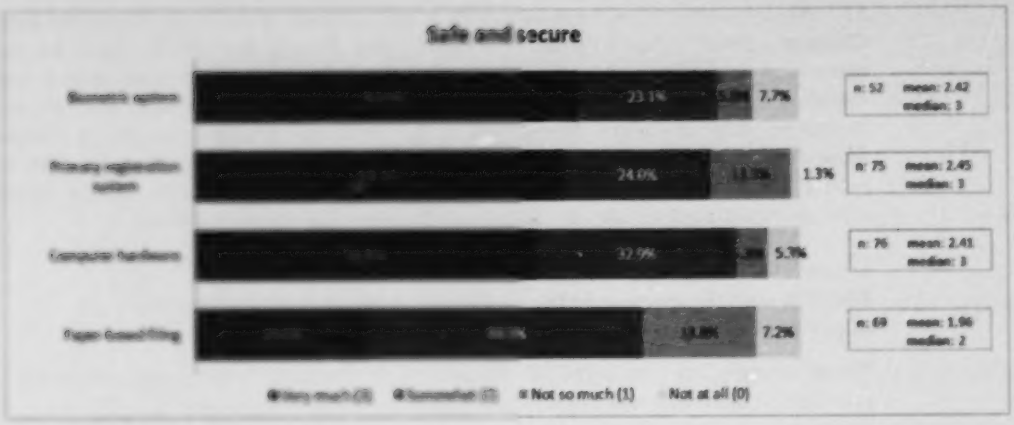
Source: Staff survey.

50. Biometric technologies generated another substantial efficiency gain, enabling UNHCR and its partners to associate unique and mostly stable physical characteristics to individuals' documented or declared information, thus anchoring individual identity over time and space. The Biometric Identity Management System), which records and stores individual fingerprints and iris patterns simultaneously, was rolled out in 24 operations starting in February 2015 (with 20 others using other biometric systems). The majority of operations continue their work without the improved effectiveness associated with this technology; and there are plans are to deploy it to 75 operations by 2020. Biometrics was intended to reduce fraud and duplication. Interviews with host government representatives and partners demonstrated that acceptance of biometrics was very high. Staff rated biometric systems to be as secure as primary registration systems, and much more conducive to effective registration work (see figure XIV).

Figure XIV
UNHCR staff perspective on technologies

"Overall, how would you rate [the following technologies available at your operation] in terms of their being easy to use, conducive to effective registration work and safe and secure?"





Source: Staff survey.

51. UNHCR also experienced challenges, such as the stalled development and deployment of the most recent version of proGres v4 (proGres in Partnership). In contrast with previous versions, proGres4 is entirely web-based and operates through a centralized database. It was designed to enhance information exchange among operations and facilitate access to case management processes managed jointly with partners. Whereas the Biometric Identity Management System already allows for the checking of identities through biometrics across operations, delays in v4 implementation have meant delays in the capitalization on its potential as a global tool for individual case management. The centralized database is expected to reduce maintenance and support costs, but it may also have the unintended consequence of stifling local innovations as sources of efficiency. In interviews, UNHCR staff indicated that the v4 delay was attributable to its manifold functionalities (which required extensive interdepartmental discussions within UNHCR) and limited funding. Once fully deployed, v4 will reportedly ensure that registration remains the foundation of all subsequent facets of case management, thus making it more systematic, and will generate more robust statistics, permitting the identification of global trends. Interviewees expressed concern that no schedule for fuller, global implementation was available.

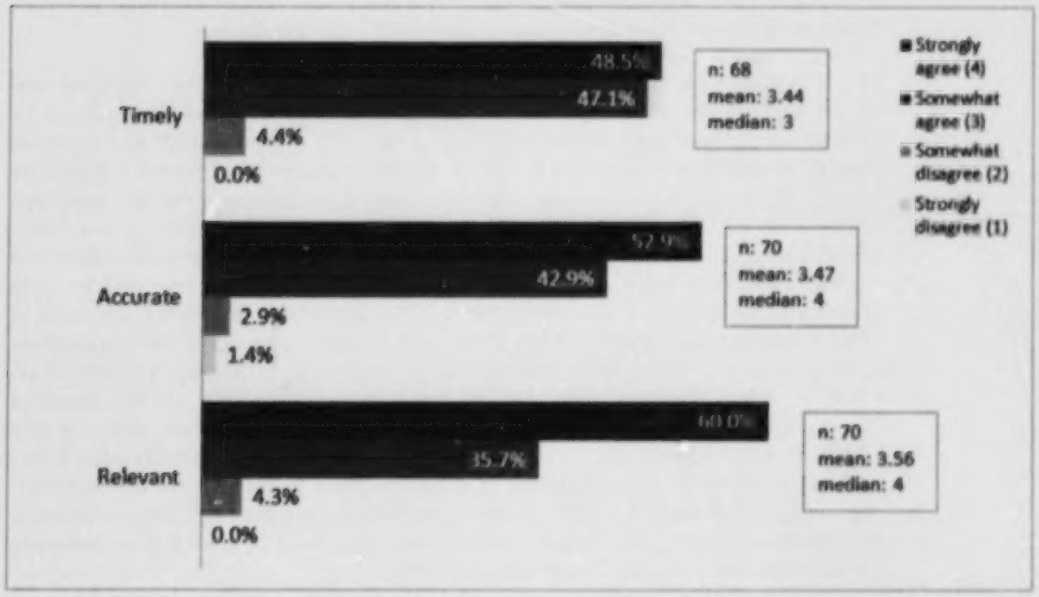
Efficiencies were recognized anecdotally, but rarely — if ever — measured

52. Anecdotal evidence from partners, resettlement country representatives and staff indicated that improvements in initial registration reduced the costs of, and expedited procedures for, verification, refugee status determination and resettlement. It also suggested that robust registration data, coupled with well-functioning partnerships, created efficiencies for assistance. Conversely, those interviewees reported that gaps in registration data negatively affected the work of UNHCR and partners, from planning to actual delivery. Staff survey respondents confirmed this picture, and strongly highlighted the importance of registration data for partners (see figure XV).

53. Systems integration between UNHCR and partners, notably the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP), built on the gains that registration data can bring. Further initiatives under way, which are intended to connect registration data with assistance distribution lists, and rely on biometric data to avert duplication (e.g., multiple registrations by a single individual), need wider global implementation. In theory, this has the potential to reduce headcount and increase economy and fairness in assistance. At the same time, there are no measures for assessing efficiencies in objective terms.

Figure XV
UNHCR staff perspective on the usefulness of registration data for the work of partners

"How strongly do you agree or disagree [that, for their work,] registration data provided to operating and implementing partners [at your operation is…]"



Source: Staff survey.

D. UNHCR has confronted the inherent tension between, on the one hand, potential benefits that accrue from widespread data sharing and a greater registration role of Governments and, on the other, potential protection-related risks

54. Registration is pivotal both to the successful fulfilment by UNHCR of its broader mandate, and to the work of its partners. Pursuant to the exercise of its registration role, UNHCR needs to ensure that all of its work is undertaken in alignment with international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law; registration must be conducted with a view to protecting the privacy of refugees and asylum seekers, including personal data.

55. Essential to this process is the assignment of clear-cut roles and responsibilities to UNHCR, host Governments and other partners; well-defined standard operating procedures; appropriate training, verification and quality-control measures; and data sharing with host Governments and other partners so as to maximize coordination. Host governments often serve as assistance providers. They are also sovereign States with legitimate security concerns.

56. UNHCR is confronted with the fundamental tension between the need to protect refugees and asylum seekers while simultaneously serving the data needs of host Governments and partners, in two main areas of registration, namely, data sharing and the increased operational role of host Governments in registration. Data sharing can help facilitate a timelier, better-targeted, better-coordinated and more effective response. At the same time, it can pose a risk of data breaches, thereby compromising the protection of already vulnerable individuals, especially in countries where data firewalls for the protection of individuals' privacy are weak. Along the same lines, while a unilateral host government role in day-to-day registration management is in accordance with its obligations under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and has the potential to significantly streamline registration processes with other governmental services and administrative functions, it can also raise protection concerns.

57. The tension between data sharing and protection is not a hypothetical prospect, since it is observed directly in case-study missions. In one case, members of specific religious groups voiced a strong reluctance to register, as they did not trust UNHCR partners' use of data and were afraid that their data might be shared with authorities in the country where they had been persecuted. This reluctance led to "exclusion error" and prevented access to assistance and protection. In another case, the host Government's shutdown of the entity responsible for refugees resulted in widespread disruption in registration processes. Subsequently, the entity was re-established. At the time of the evaluation, UNHCR was in the process of ceding leadership of registration processes to this very entity; if a future shutdown were to recur after data, and data management, were handed over to this entity, hundreds of thousands of persons of concern would be in jeopardy.

58. The Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has acknowledged this tension,[52] a concern reiterated by UNHCR staff at Headquarters and at field level, as well as partners (including select host government representatives). UNHCR has therefore taken steps to address these concerns. In some countries, it developed specific memorandums of understanding and data-sharing agreements with partners and host Governments. (There were nine such arrangements across the 12 countries included in its analysis.) However, they were of varying specificity and clarity and some were unsigned. Further, they do not have meaning unless enforced. In May 2015, UNHCR issued a Policy on the Protection of Personal Data of Persons of Concern to UNHCR, which provides guidance on confidentiality and data-sharing standards and articulates clear criteria for verifying partners' data capacity. Additionally, proGres v4 contains a specific consent form which persons of concern could use to

[52] Executive Committee conclusion No. 91 (LII) on registration of refugees and asylum seekers (2001).

specify which information can be shared with whom. The effects of these efforts have yet to be seen, however.

V. Conclusion

59. Registration serves as a foundational element for achievement of the UNHCR mandate. Towards this end, UNHCR has navigated complex and shifting social and political environments to shape its role in relation to host Governments, which bear the ultimate responsibility for registration. It has also sought to be maximally relevant in the provision of its specific registration support, and in its attempts to "leave no one behind". Numerous examples evidence the ways in which its registration work has contributed to successful assistance, protection and durable solutions.

60. Looking to the future, UNHCR, host Governments and other partners will face renewed and novel challenges, many of which are articulated in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (General Assembly resolution 71/1) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Assembly resolution 70/1). Not least of these is the need to ensure measures through which States address their legitimate security concerns in a manner that is consistent with their obligations under international refugee law. In this regard, continued technical expertise, coupled with redoubled advocacy work, will prove pivotal. Future success in registration will also depend on multilateral support so as to ensure adequate resourcing of all country operations; strong and stable working relationships with host Governments and partners; ongoing staff capacity-building; and widespread recognition that the initial costs of better registration can generate value, credibility, savings and security, without sacrificing the protection of refugees and asylum seekers.

VI. Recommendations

61. OIOS makes five recommendations, which it deems important according to its criticality rating system.

Recommendation 1 (paras. 17-19, 29, 36, 40, 41, 48-50 and 56-61)

In order to sustain momentum on recent relevance-, effectiveness- and efficiency-enhancing initiatives, UNHCR should:

1. Update the 2003 Handbook for Registration and related policies/guidelines, with a view to ensuring consistency across operations to the maximum degree feasible;

2. Complete the specifications of the Identity Management Quality Initiative;

3. Strengthen the progressive implementation of its Policy on the Protection of Personal Data of Persons of Concern to UNHCR, including the development of associated guidance and training to address data

protection and refugee consent issues, both with UNHCR operations and among host Governments and other partners.

Indicators: (a) Handbook updated; (b) Identity Management Quality Initiative specifications completed; (c) data protection operational guidance developed; (d) Evidence of promotion, implementation, coverage and use of (a)-(c)

Recommendation 2 (paras. 22-24, 27-29, 30-32, 39-42 and 60)

In line with its mandate, and with the call of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind, UNHCR should:

1. In an evidence-based manner, identify country operations known to have low registration coverage, and also identify, within these operations, the underlying reasons for access barriers, and their implications for other aspects of the UNHCR mandate (assistance, protection and durable solutions);

2. Articulate, where low registration coverage has had negative impacts, plans for addressing challenges in a timely manner within each of these operations;

3. Building on data in this report, identify country operations where enhanced advocacy efforts are needed to ensure that the human rights of all persons of concern are protected in government-led registration processes, and undertake these efforts, as feasible.

Indicators: (a) underlying reasons for and implications of access barriers identified in low-coverage countries in an evidence-based manner; (b) plans for addressing country-specific challenges identified; (c) high-priority country operations identified and advocacy undertaken, wherever feasible; (d) evidence of promotion, implementation, coverage and use of (a)-(c)

Recommendation 3 (paras. 27, 28, 31, 32, 35, 36, 40, 47, 51 and 52)

In order to increase the accuracy, quality and robustness of registration data used in downstream processes, UNHCR should finalize the development and accelerate the roll-out of proGres v4 (proGres in Partnership).

Indicators: roll-out of proGres v4 accelerated, leading to evidence of higher accuracy and quality of registration data and more effective case management

Recommendation 4 (paras. 53-55)

UNHCR should identify, with partners, which registration data elements most enhance their shared work on meeting the needs of refugees and asylum seekers. Pertinent indicators for these and any other data elements that are key to measuring the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of inter-agency humanitarian action should then be developed and utilized to measure effectiveness, in close collaboration with key partners.

Indicator: registration data elements most valuable for key partners identified, indicators developed and monitored

Recommendation 5 (See figures based on Global Focus Insight data (paras. 15, 45 and 53-55)

In order to strengthen registration-related monitoring data so that they can be utilized more fully as a foundation for evidence-based planning and decision-making, UNHCR should increase the number of operations reporting under registration-related objectives on Global Focus Insight (or other appropriate outlets emanating from the results-based management revision project).

Indicator: number of operations reporting increased

Annex I

Formal comments provided by UNHCR

In the present annex, OIOS presents the full text of comments received from UNHCR on the evaluation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. This practice has been instituted in line with General Assembly resolution 64/263, following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.

UNHCR response to the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) programme evaluation of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

1. In response to your memorandum of 6 March 2017 addressed to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, on the programme evaluation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), please find below the main observations of UNHCR on the formal draft report. In a separate document, annexed to this memorandum, we provide further details on the planned actions to implement the recommendations.

2. The evaluation assesses the role of UNHCR in the registration of refugees and asylum seekers from 2012 to 2016. Registration (or identity management) is a highly complex topic. It is impacted by the different operational contexts across the world, thus the level of involvement of UNHCR varies greatly. Registration is a continuous activity, requiring regular updating and verification, and has numerous protection aspects. Protection encompasses all actions aimed at ensuring the equal access to and enjoyment of rights of women, men, girls and boys of concern to UNHCR, in accordance with the relevant bodies of law, including international refugee law, human rights law and humanitarian law. There is a broad span of protection activities that are serviced and informed by quality registration. There may also be some operational contexts where registration may not per se have a positive protection impact or protection dividends for persons of concern and that can be achieved without individual registration.

3. Undertaking an evaluation of this subject at global level is necessarily a challenge. We appreciate that the limitations in time and resources as well as the maximum length of the report did not allow for a more in-depth and broad review of the various aspects of registration, including the different protection angles and nuances, in different operational contexts and settings. Nevertheless, the report does capture various important elements related to registration, so we would like to commend OIOS for having undertaken this challenging evaluation.

4. OIOS mainly drew data from Global Focus Insight, the UNHCR internal business intelligence tool. While this may provide relevant management information, it should be kept in mind that the UNHCR current Results Framework has some 185 impact indicators and over 700 performance indicators. Out of the entire Results Framework, operations select those objectives and corresponding indicators that are most important or that best capture their priorities. Due to the wide variety of operations and their specific contexts, these can change over time

and differ from operation to operation. This would need to be taken into consideration when analysing and drawing high-level findings based on indicator data in Global Focus Insight.

5. In addition, UNHCR is capturing and maintaining various data sets in different systems such as Managing Systems, Resources and People, the UNHCR resource management system covering finance, supply chain, human resources and payroll, as well as a specific database for population statistics, which is in the public domain (http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/). While the latter records information from various sources, it does allow for tracking the number of UNHCR registered individual refugees and asylum seekers per annum. These systems are the authoritative source for related data. Due to an apparent miscommunication, the over-reliance on Global Focus Insight data came to the fore at a late stage in the process. The strict deadline for completion of the report did not allow these limitations to be addressed.

6. Notwithstanding these shortcomings, the evaluation, by and large, captures interesting findings and draws attention to some key related issues. Overall, UNHCR agrees with the high-level recommendations. Various actions to implement them are already ongoing and will be continued as required. UNHCR acknowledges the need to take further steps to strengthen its registration data analysis, and to share this with key partners. Finalization of all remaining functionalities of proGres v4 (proGres in Partnership) and the planned accelerated roll-out will facilitate this further. Moreover, UNHCR has also recently embarked on a review of its Results-Based Management Framework. Within this context, it will also review indicators, including those related to registration.

7. We would like to take this opportunity to thank you and your colleagues for their cooperation throughout the conduct of this evaluation.

Annex II

Response of OIOS to comments of UNHCR

1. OIOS thanks UNHCR for its comments, and for the general appreciation expressed to OIOS for its work in addressing this highly complex evaluation topic.

2. With regard to the data sources used in the analysis, as raised in paragraphs 4 and 5 of the UNHCR memorandum included in annex I, it should be noted that the evaluation inception paper, developed in consultation with UNHCR at the outset of the evaluation, clearly stated the intention to use UNHCR Global Focus Insight and Managing Systems, Resources and People (MSRP) data as part of the evaluation methodology. Contrary to the claim of UNHCR in paragraph 5, MSRP data was in fact used for analysis of budgets, expenditures and positions (figures VIII, IX and X); data were merely extracted using Global Focus Insight, hence Global Focus Insight was cited as the source. The OIOS evaluation team worked closely with UNHCR throughout the evaluation (with excellent inputs from UNHCR colleagues) in order to make use of these data in a credible manner, and during the report finalization process, still other UNHCR colleagues who were most closely involved in monitoring data systems confirmed that the OIOS analyses were indeed as robust as possible, in light of UNHCR data limitations.

3. From past and current OIOS inspections and evaluations of UNHCR, the limitations and shortcomings of the Global Focus Insight data are well known to be less than fit for purpose for a large and complex organization like UNHCR; but these are nevertheless the only official sources of UNHCR monitoring data. OIOS has noted the attendant data limitations in paragraph 14 and footnote 19 of the present report. OIOS based its conclusions on a mixed-method approach through which, it triangulated all available data from the sources enumerated in paragraph 14. The conclusions in this report follow this principle; accordingly, no conclusions were based solely on any single data source — on Global Focus Insight, the Managing Systems, Resources and People system, or others. In implementing recommendation 5, UNHCR will have the opportunity to reinforce the data it has available for evidence-based planning and decision-making.

4. These comments notwithstanding, OIOS is encouraged by the fact that, in its management response, UNHCR has broadly accepted the evaluation's analysis, results statements and recommendations.